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PARTICIPATORY PLACE BRANDING IN THE MUNICIPAL SECTOR

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The purpose of this thesis is to study participatory place branding in the municipal sector. The aim is to find out the benefits and challenges of participatory place branding in the municipal sector, to examine the current practices and find out possible aspects for development. Three Finnish municipalities – Pori, Vaasa and Järvenpää – are chosen as case studies for this study, as they have conducted their place branding in a participatory way in recent years. Place branding has been a topic of interest in the academic literature for several decades, but participatory place branding is still a rather new phenomenon, and not much research has yet been done on that field. There is lack of research on participatory place branding especially in the municipal sector.</p> <p>This research is conducted as a qualitative multiple-case study and the empirical data is collected via three semi-structured interviews, one interview from each case municipality. The interviewees had been closely involved in their municipalities' participatory place branding, allowing them to give a comprehensive overview of their processes. The theoretical framework of this study is conducted by studying earlier research on the topic. By examining the empirical data and reflecting it against the existing academic literature, an extensive view has been formed as how participatory place branding is used in the municipal sector, and what its benefits and challenges are. Based on this examination also matters of development have been found.</p> <p>The findings of this study emphasize that with participatory place branding a genuine, more authentic brand can be formed. The participatory approach also reduced criticism towards the new brand. Furthermore, the continuous feedback from the stakeholders throughout the process was seen very valuable. The main challenge of participatory place branding was considered to be the fact that it takes up more time and resources. A challenge is also a certain attitude-change that is required; in the process all the power is given to the stakeholders. The findings show that participatory place branding is rather similarly used in municipalities, and the process can roughly be divided into five stages. For future development, it is essential to take the participatory approach into account already in the competitive bidding stage, and a well-thought inclusion plan needs to be drafted already in the beginning of the branding process.</p> <p>This study provides a thorough understanding of how participatory place branding is used in the municipal sector. This allows for municipalities planning their own participatory process to take into account the benefits it will bring and what challenges may be ahead, and to prepare better for the process. This study also acts as a basis for future studies examining participatory place branding in more detail.</p>			
Keywords Participatory branding, inclusive branding, place branding, co-creation, municipal sector			
Additional information			

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1 INTRODUCTION

Although place branding in general has been an interest of academic research for many decades, participatory place branding is a rather new phenomenon. However, the interest towards it is rapidly increasing, and the significance of including different stakeholders in the process is becoming apparent. As place branding is mostly in the hands of the local government officials, it is very much a public sector operation.

Place branding has been constantly growing, especially when different regions have realized to exploit bigger events, especially great sports events, in promoting their place internationally (de San Eugenio, Ginesta, Compte-Pujol & Frigola-Reig, 2019). An image of a place is not something to take lightly; it can be a deal-breaker for individuals deciding where to live or visit, or companies deciding where to locate their business (Harmaakorpi, Kari & Parjanen, 2008). Also, the object of place branding is to differentiate places from one another, and at the same time create a positive image in their stakeholders (Henninger, Foster, Alevizou & Frohlich, 2016).

But how to build an authentic brand for a place? Many academic studies have concluded that including stakeholders in the place branding process helps in creating a stronger and a more believable brand. For example, Medway, Swanson, Pasquinelli and Zenker (2015) reported on an academic debate about place branding, and the outcome was that place brands need to be developed in a more inclusive direction. When stakeholders are participating in the process, it prevents the brand to become pretentious and hypocrite. Also, the research by de San Eugenio et al. (2019) concludes that resident participation is a key element in the construction of place brands. Place branding in cooperation can also reduce resistance as the stakeholders are included in the process, and the brand is not produced merely with a marketing agency. For example in Manchester the city's branding campaign was ended as a stakeholder group criticized it as not reflecting the city properly, and they launched a rivalling campaign (Klijn, Eshuis & Braun, 2012). If the stakeholders agree that the image projected of their place is correct, they will live the brand – otherwise the gap between the image and reality is likely to create dissonance (de San Eugenio et al., 2019).

The resident's right to participate and influence the activities of the municipality are written in the Local Government Act of Finland (Finlex, 410/2015, section 22). According to this act the residents of the municipality and the users of services must have diverse and effective opportunities for participation. These include for example arranging opportunities for discussion and finding out residents' opinions before making decisions. Therefore, as municipalities have a legal obligation to include their stakeholders into decision-making, it is good to extend this also to branding. Inclusion is also one of the main ways to increase well-being among residents (Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos, 2019), and as the own hometown is usually very dear and close to heart, it is important for the residents to be able to influence how that place is branded.

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this thesis is to study participatory place branding in the public sector, more specifically in the municipal sector. This study aims at finding out the benefits and challenges of participatory place branding in the municipal sector by analysing three participatory place branding processes. Its objective is also to shed light on the current practices of participatory place branding in the municipal sector of Finland, and to find out how these practices could be developed in the future.

The author became interested in conducting a study about this particular topic as the municipality she works for decided to renew its brand in a participatory way. Whilst doing background research the author discovered that a few Finnish cities had done their branding process in a participatory way in the last couple of years. As well as providing valuable insight for the author for her work, this study will also help other municipalities in understanding the importance of participatory approach in their place branding processes. Benchmarking the experiences of other municipalities – the case studies presented in this thesis – and how they have implemented participatory approach in their branding will help municipalities in planning their own participatory place branding process: what details to take into account, what benefits it will bring and what challenges may be ahead.

As the author examined the academic studies about participatory place branding, she discovered a research gap. There are only a few previous Finnish studies made about

the topic, and the number of comprehensive studies worldwide is not yet very numerous. Also, a gap can be found between conceptualising and applying a clear framework on how to engage local actors in place branding (Rebelo, Mehmood & Marsden, 2019). This study sheds light on how three Finnish cities have successfully involved, engaged and empowered stakeholders in their branding processes. For example Lichrou et al. (2017, via Rebelo et al., 2019) have expressed the need for exploratory studies to evaluate new concepts, theories and methodologies to help understand participatory place branding. This study will provide new and valuable information both for academic research and in practice, as it analyses three real-life cases how participatory place branding has been used in the municipal sector. Furthermore, as there are not a lot of studies about participatory place branding specifically in the municipal sector, this study aims at filling that gap.

There were enough sources available to find relevant scientific articles, but as mentioned earlier, the amount of Finnish studies about the topic was scarce. Although participatory place branding seems to be a rather new phenomena in Finland, three cities could be easily found to have conducted their brand renewal in a participatory way in the recent years. Fortunately, the representatives of these three chosen cities were willing to participate in the interviews, so the author could gain the needed data for the study.

1.2 Research questions

This study contains one main research question and two sub-questions and aims to answer them from the viewpoint of Finnish municipalities.

Main research question: *What are the key benefits and challenges of participatory place branding in the municipal sector?*

The main research question aims at finding out the key benefits that emerge when using participatory place branding in the municipal sector. The focus is also in discovering the possible challenges.

Sub-question 1: *How is participatory place branding used in the municipal sector?*

Sub-question 2: *How could participatory place branding be developed further?*

The purpose of the sub-questions is to more deeply map the essence of participatory place branding in the municipal sector. By answering them, conclusions can be drawn as how participatory place branding processes are organized and what methods are used. Furthermore, by examining the three case municipalities and reflecting the findings to the existing academic literature, suggestions for future development with regards to participatory place branding can be provided.

1.3 Defining key concepts

Brand

Perhaps the most common definition of a brand is that it is ‘a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors’ (Kotler et al., 1999, 571 via Klijn, Eshuis & Braun, 2012). Brands are not something tangible, as they exist in the minds of the consumers; the brand delivers the meaning and value to the product and determines its identity (Klijn et al., 2012).

Branding

The target of branding is to increase the value of a branded object, for example a place, by giving it symbolic meaning that is valuable to consumers (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). Branding is a continuous process, where the brand is recreated and implemented in co-creation with its consumers and stakeholders (Klijn et al., 2012).

Place branding

The objective of place branding is to increase the attractiveness of that place (Harmaakorpi, Kari & Parjanen, 2008): to entice residents, companies, tourists or investors to a place, to create a positive image of a place and to differentiate it from other places (Braun, 2011 and Kavaratzis, 2008 via Klijn et al., 2012).

Public sector branding

Public sector branding aims at influencing public perceptions of places, organizations, policies and politicians. Although it is nowadays used rather widely, it is still behind the private sector with regards to budgets, experience and general branding knowledge. (Klijn et al., 2012).

Participatory branding

Participatory, by definition, is a participatory system, activity, or a role, which involves a particular person or group of people taking part in it (Collins English Dictionary, 2020). Participatory branding involves the stakeholders in the branding process, allowing them to genuinely influence the outcome.

1.4 Research process and methods

The theoretical part of this study was conducted by examining the existing academic literature about participatory place branding and the theories attached to it. The empirical data is gathered from three semi-structured interviews and the interview questions were formed based on the theory.

This study is done as a qualitative research, and it uses a multiple-case study approach. As Vuignier (2017) points out, the literature on place marketing and place branding has largely been studied using single case studies. Therefore, for this study three case municipalities and their participatory place branding processes were chosen. The case municipalities are medium large Finnish cities; Pori, Vaasa and Järvenpää. Altogether three interviews were conducted; one from every case municipality. The conclusions were drawn comparing the findings from empirical data and the theoretical background.

The research process followed a multiple-case study approach. First the theory was examined and developed, case municipalities were selected, and the data collection method was designed. Next, the interviews were conducted and analyzed. The final

stage of the research process included drawing conclusions, developing implications and writing the final report.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis proceeds as follows. In chapter 2 the theoretical background of this thesis is presented, and from that the theoretical framework for this study is constructed. Chapter 3 consists of the description and justification of the data being used, and it also explains and justifies the chosen research methods. Chapter 4 presents the empirical study: the empirical data that has been obtained through semi-structured interviews is analyzed and the findings are reflected against the theoretical background presented in chapter 2. Chapter 5 consists of findings and conclusions of this study. It includes answering to the research questions and interpreting the findings with regards to the theoretical framework being used. Managerial implications and limitations of the study are also discussed. Additionally, some directions for future research are provided.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter will explain the main theoretical concepts around the topic of this thesis, including place branding, participatory place branding and public sector branding. It will take a look at the previous research on the topic. Additionally, the challenges of participatory place branding are addressed. As service-dominant logic is increasingly attached to place branding, it will also be touched on. In the end of this chapter a theoretical framework for this study is presented.

2.1 Place branding

A place brand is more of a perception, rather than the physical, concrete characteristics of a certain place (Vuignier, 2017). Zenker and Braun (2010, 5 via Hereźniak, 2017) define a place brand as “a network of associations in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place’s stakeholders and the overall place design.”

The academic literature has handled place branding for over four decades, and recently the topic has gained a more central place in place management (Hereźniak, 2017). Zenker and Erfgen (2014) identify that in the 1970s O’Leary and Iredal were the first to claim place marketing to be a challenging new area for the future, and after this there were first publications from regional economists concerning this topic. Also they find that the branding of cities and other places has gained popularity among practitioners and academics only in the recent years. Vuignier (2017) has done an extensive systematic literature review about place marketing and place branding, extending from 1976 to 2016, which covers altogether 1172 articles. In his study he finds that there still isn’t a conceptual clarity in this field, the definitions are diverse and the theoretical foundation is rather weak. Based on his comprehensive review, Vuignier concludes that this field of study is multidisciplinary by nature, but it has not yet reached a mature stage.

Formerly place branding was mostly place promotion related to tourism, but this caused many problems (Hereźniak, 2017). The building of brands then remained only

in the stage of advertising a “perfect” image of the place, which was not very realistic. Hereźniak (2017) concludes that this resulted in considering place branding as an outward-oriented process, and therefore made it irrelevant for the residents. This caused negative attitudes and criticism about public resources used for this activity.

During recent years, service-dominant logic has been more and more attached to place branding. In service-dominant logic the focus shifts from the traditional tangible goods to more intangible services, and the orientation is more on interactivity and the consumer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). One of the first academic papers, which applied the fundamental principles of service-dominant logic to the marketing of places is by Warnaby (2009). Also Kavaratzis (2012) notes that there has been a slow appearance of a new conceptualization of place branding, and it is due to recent emergence of a service-dominant logic for marketing. Service-dominant logic places a great emphasis on the co-creation of value (Williams & Aitken, 2011) and it is less business-based (Eletxigerra, Barrutia & Echebarria, 2018); therefore it resonates well with place branding in the public sector. Hereźniak (2017) points out the importance of service-dominant logic in influencing how places are branded and managed. In service-dominant logic the importance of stakeholders is highlighted, and this adds to the creation of value (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). As service-dominant logic takes a perspective of value co-creation and emphasizes the role of exchange between different levels – for example individuals and organizations – (Vargo & Lusch, 2008), it will be interesting to look at the participatory place branding process through service-dominant logic lenses.

Aitken and Campelo (2011) suggest a bottom-up approach should be applied in place branding, which in their opinion would obtain authenticity for the brand, make the stakeholders more committed, and create brand sustainability. They propose a model of “four Rs” of place branding, which are identified as rights, roles, responsibilities and relationships. The synthesis of these four elements is the primary determinant for a place brand. The four Rs have arisen from the community’s social capital or its practices, and they are recreated and co-created through community engagement – participation and inclusiveness, that is. It is crucial to grasp the interactions between these four elements, as it will help in understanding the sense of place, the structure of the community, and the role of ownership.

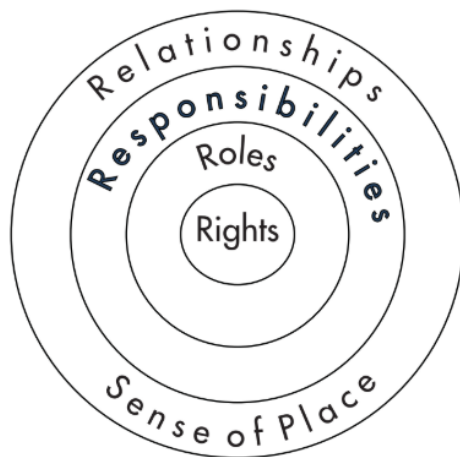


Figure 1. The four Rs of place branding (adapted from Aitken and Campelo, 2011, p. 926).

Rebelo et al. (2019) identify several shortcomings in the mainstream place branding procedures. They state that often place branding is rather market-driven and entrepreneurially centred, and therefore it is neglecting residents and their needs. Rebelo et al. (2019) classify three types of criticism towards current place branding practices. Firstly, if the perspectives of local history, characteristics and culture are neglected, it creates negativity, and place branding is seen as serving only the interests of local elites and external audiences. The disregard of regional contexts can also lead to the sameness of places instead of eliciting the local assets and individual identity. Secondly, excluding residents from place branding practices has sometimes resulted in “shadow” brands created by the citizens, or even public demonstrations against the official brand. This highlights the importance of resident inclusion and engagement in place branding. Thirdly, there has recently been an emergence in stakeholder-inclusive academic literature due to the criticism towards the common place branding practices. This literature underlines the key role of stakeholders in brand co-creation and development. (Rebelo et al., 2019)

In their academic paper, Medway, Swanson, Pasquinelli and Zenker (2015) find that currently place branding is something that is done to a place rather than something that is organically emerging from different stakeholders, and this makes the present practices inadequate. Also Kavaratzis (2012) has recognized inadequacies in the current place branding procedures; considering place branding as a linear process,

taking a too narrow view of the role of place branding, and the unclear and underestimated role of residents in place branding. Kavaratzis (2012) states that place branding is mostly considered a linear process of managerial decision making. But as place branding is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, this type of approach is not the most effective. Instead of those linear steps taken in turn, place branding should be understood as a complex web of intertwined, simultaneous processes. The second shortcoming is that the role of place branding is usually considered as defining a single place identity, finding out ways how the defined identity is relevant to several audiences, and attempting to convince audiences that the place is relevant to them. This type of approach limits the role of branding to merely a communication-promotional tool, emphasizing visual strategies, and will limit the place branding process to the development of new logos and slogans. However, as these elements are emphasized in the process and communicated through media, it has led to the “sameness” of large European cities and their communications. Kavaratzis (2012) criticizes that this way the slogans are too generic to convey meaning or too similar to differentiate. The third inadequacy in place branding is that the roles of the residents is unclear and their importance in the process is largely underestimated. When the focus of place branding is on investment and tourism, the messages can appear unattached for the internal audiences and the existing residents. This is because the residents are often left outside of the branding decisions, which leads to not connecting with the place. (Kavaratzis, 2012) This guides us in the direction of participatory place branding.

2.2 Participatory place branding

Jernsand (2016, 14) defines participatory place branding, or inclusive place branding as she calls it, as follows: “Inclusive place branding is an evolutionary process characterised by transformation, participation, multiplicity and democracy. Inclusive place branding guides sustainable place development through the facilitation of a social process of interaction between place stakeholders, with the aim of building sustainable place brand equity.” It can be stated that participatory place branding is contradicting the traditional view of marketing; that marketing is done by marketers to customers (Ind & Bjerke, 2007).

Zenker and Erfgen (2014) point out that the residents of a place are the ones who legitimize and – by paying tax – finance the work and monetary resources put in place branding. They continue that the process requires, as well as political support, first of all resident approval. It is also found out that when the stakeholders have been involved in the construction of the brand, they feel more committed and loyal towards it; this is because the stakeholders feel that they have been able to influence the content of the brand (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014 via Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). These facts underline that the residents taking part in the place branding process seems to be rather necessary (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014).

Hereźniak (2017) notes that often in place branding strategies and practices residents are still underrated and underrepresented as a group. Bennet and Savani (2003, via Braun, Kavaratzis & Zenker, 2013) concluded in their study that residents are not regarded as important stakeholders in the branding of places, and that the brands were usually decided in a top-down manner by local government authorities. Kavaratzis (2012) takes one step further in stating that residents are even considered as a “necessary evil” in the place branding procedure. One of the reasons for overlooking residents is that economic interests are often put first in prevailing place branding practices (Rebelo et al., 2019). However, recently the importance of residents and other stakeholders in the place branding processes is growing, due to theoretical developments and empirical observations (Hereźniak, 2017).

For example Ind and Bjerke (2007) argue that brand building is too important and complex to be done just by the marketing department, but should be an organisation-wide engagement. They suggest that in order to build a strong brand, a participatory approach should be implemented. According to them, the principle of that approach is that all of the customers and other external audiences as well as internal (managers and employees) are active participants in defining and developing the brand. This however requires that the relationship between external and internal audiences – customers and employees – must have respect and authenticity.

Braun et al. (2013) have identified three roles for existing residents in creating place brands; they are simultaneously an integrated part of place brands because of their characteristics and behaviour, they act as brand ambassadors of their place, and are

citizens of a place – residents and voters vital for the political legitimization of place branding. Braun et al. (2013) describe the residents as being the “bread and butter” of a place, when it comes to the first role. This means that the residents of a place and their interplay with each other and people outside of the place creates the atmosphere of that place. The second role, residents as brand ambassadors, is also an important one because word-of-mouth is usually considered trustworthy and authentic (Braun et al., 2013). Therefore, the residents can convey messages about the place that are seen as informal and “insider information” to external target groups. Braun et al. (2013) state that the third role of residents as citizens is the most neglected one in place branding theory and practice. Kavaratzis (2012) notes that because of these roles, the residents are in fact the most important target market of place branding. In order to create a sustainable place brand, there is a need for meaningful consultation with residents – this way the booby trap of a factitious, imposturous brand can be avoided (Kavaratzis, 2012). Braun et al. (2013) stress that residents should be given many opportunities to actively take part in decision making, and this includes place branding. Kavaratzis (2012) is in accordance with this and highlights the importance of planning a possibility for stakeholder participation for every stage of the place branding strategy.

Kavaratzis and Hatch (2012, via Kavaratzis, 2012) emphasize that the stakeholders should not merely be treated as passive groups of people to be consulted on the place brand. Rather, they need to be considered as active groups of people, who can be motivated into defining their own meaning of the place brand. Also Zenker and Erfgen (2014) address this issue. They point out that often only in the beginning of a place branding project residents are consulted – if at all, for that matter – and only to find out their brand associations. This approach, however, is not appropriate participatory place branding, but only means to make residents feel important and included in the process (Zenker and Erfgen, 2014).

Hereźniak (2017) makes an observation about the vagueness of ownership in participatory branding, as she cites Eshuis et al. that “marketers neither own nor control the brand”. Aitken and Campelo (2011) take a clear stand on this issue of ownership, as they state that a place brand belongs to the place and its people. They justify this claim by stating that the basis of ownership lies within the creation of

meanings and values of the brand. Klijn et al. (2012) find that many authors in the field of branding and marketing have indeed come to a conclusion that control over the brand is in fact an illusion. Also Sevin (2011) addresses the issue of ownership, and additionally brings up the ethical perspective. He asks who has the right to tamper with the image of a place: is it the elected officials or does that right belong to the people – the residents, that is. Sevin also raises the question of whether place branding estranges the residents from their hometowns. He emphasizes that place branding is strongly linked with the identity of the place and the residents, so the decisions about elements linked to the brand need to be made with caution. Although there seems to be discussion about the ethicality of participatory branding, it can be stated that it is a mean of enabling different stakeholders to influence the brand and participate in the process of creating meaning for the brand (Hereźniak, 2017).

Zenker and Erfgen (2014) highlight the importance of residents in the place branding process. They argue that the residents acting as ambassadors for the place is the most valuable asset in place branding. In their study, they outline a framework of a truly participatory approach for place branding, in which they identify three stages (see figure 2.). Stage 1 consists of defining a shared vision for the place including core place elements. Capturing this data can be done for example using in-depth interviews or focus group workshops. After the data is gathered with these methods, the place brand managers should compress the outcomes into key components and factors which are essential for the economic and social success of the place. Also, a shared vision for the place should be accomplished using the data gathered from the workshops. This vision describes how the place wants to be seen, what it stands for and how it wants to develop in the future. Zenker and Erfgen (2014) identify that many participatory place branding procedures stop after this first stage. In their model, there are still two more stages to come. In stage 2 a structure for participation is implemented. They suggest that a certain amount of the annual budget should be set aside for place branding projects, intended for realizing resident proposals. The residents would be given a chance to suggest a business plan, which would support and further the participatory place branding. A specific place marketing board would choose the winning ideas, which would get the funding. Finally, in stage 3, the residents of the place are supported in their own place branding projects and the projects are monitored. In this stage the projects of the residents should be supported, for example by providing them

with the knowledge and expertise of the place marketers. Also, during this stage the funded projects are monitored and their success is measured. There does not currently appear to be proper success measurement tools in place marketing practice, so these tools need to be developed.

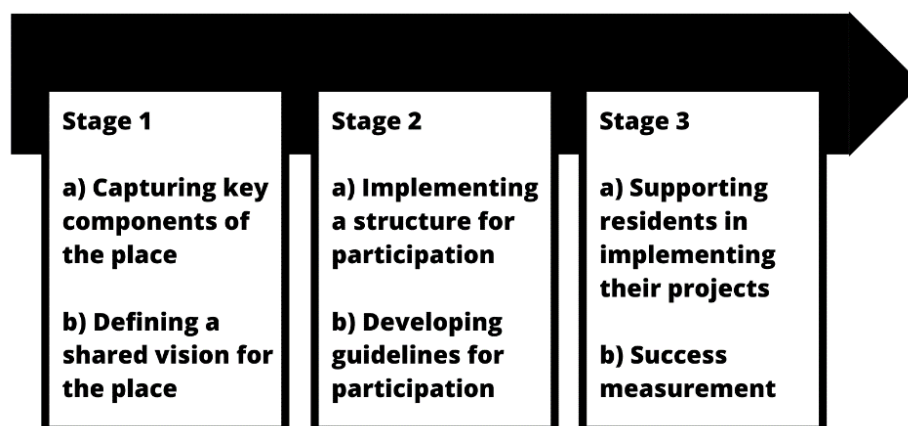


Figure 2. Process diagram for a participatory place branding approach (adapted from Zenker and Erfgen, 2014).

Zenker and Erfgen (2014, through Braun et al.) identify three different roles for the residents in the place branding process: 1) The current residents are an integral part in forming the place brand in the minds of the place's consumers, and they also communicate messages about the place's core values to all other target groups, 2) Residents identifying with the place will more probably become ambassadors of the place, 3) Residents – as citizens of the place – hold the key in making or breaking the whole place branding effort. Zenker and Erfgen point out that this can indeed turn out to be the biggest challenge for place brand managers. Zenker and Erfgen stress that the ambassador role of the residents can turn into a very strong word-of-mouth tool for strengthening and communicating the place brand if the process is handled with care. Furthermore, Zenker and Erfgen underline that place marketers should recognize this role of the residents, and therefore aim to strengthen their civic pride and sense of belonging.

Rebelo et al. (2019) suggest a framework for inclusive place branding (see figure 3). They argue that a place-based approach for place branding should be the core of all participatory place branding processes, as it allows the communities to be in charge of

their own future. In the framework the place-based contextualization means that a place is considered as an outcome of multiple, dynamic and constantly changing social interactions, discarding the “one-size-fits-all” perception of mainstream branding practices. A re-appreciation process, guided by a researcher and or practitioner, can lead the residents to newly appreciate their place. This will help them in becoming more aware of the place features and strengths and allow them to more easily come up with future visions. Re-positioning is linked to re-appreciation process, and it assists the residents to change their relationship with the place from passive to active. This helps them in communicating their place meanings, values and perceptions to place brand managers. When the residents are truly interactively included in the place branding process, they are more likely to become brand ambassadors (Braun et al., 2013). The first two processes in the framework by Rebelo et al. (2019), re-appreciation and re-positioning, aim at achieving active involvement in the branding process, and ultimately leading them to becoming brand ambassadors. Further, it creates the sense of shared responsibility and ownership for the residents, which will improve their sense of belonging and pride for the place, enhancing their willingness to act as ambassadors. Rebelo et al. (2019) stress the importance of ambassadorship of a place, as it gives an authentic and trustworthy picture of the place and its values, and is therefore very effective.

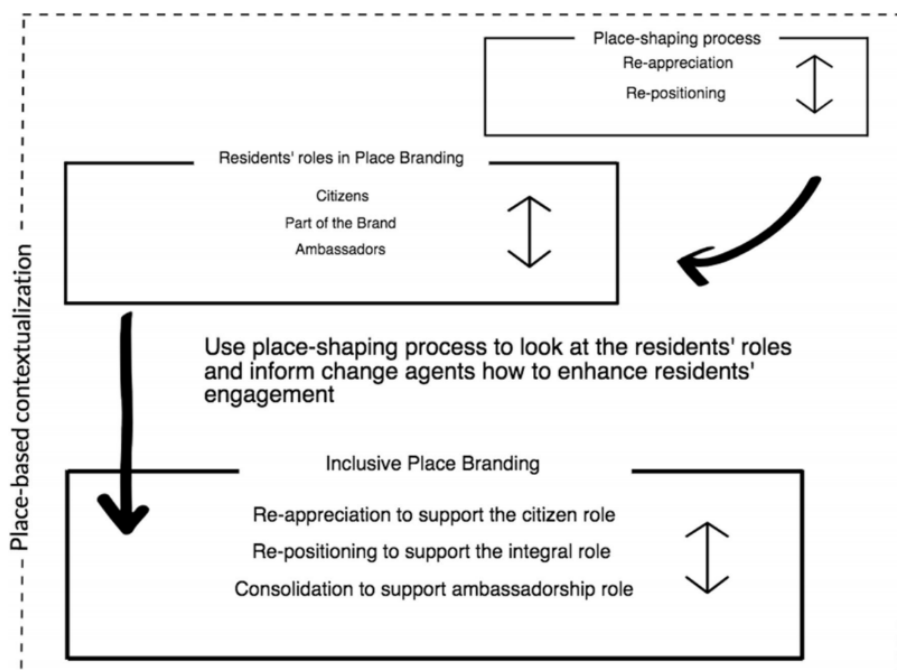


Figure 3. A framework for inclusive place branding by Rebelo et. al (2019, 4).

2.3 Place branding in the public sector

In order to understand place branding in the municipal sector, there is a need to first take a look at public sector branding in general. Many private sector branding governances – for example learnings about the substance of the brand, marketing strategy and marketing activities – can be transferred to the public sector (Klijn et al., 2012), but also many differences in the public sector branding can be found. Public managers use branding to influence people about policy content and processes, and to motivate and attract them to governance processes (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012).

Eshuis and Klijn (2012) point out that over time brands have become empirical phenomena in governance, but still their usage is rather limited in public administration and policy sciences. This is something that public organizations should pay more attention to, as their brands can have also negative effects. If a public sector's brand is seen negatively as a bureaucratic organization, it will influence – even beforehand – how their policies are experienced by the public (Klijn et al., 2012). Also, as place branding is a rather new policy in public management, there is a risk that it might suffer from fragmentation and a shortcoming of coordination with other policy activities (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014).

Gromark and Melin (2013) point out that unfortunately brands are seldom considered as strategic resources in the public sector. Jernsand (2016) has defined five elements of resident inclusive branding (see figure 4), which broaden the understanding of how the brand can be used as a strategic tool for developing a city. The five elements are 1) evolutionary process, 2) transformation, 3) participation, 4) multiplicity, and 5) democracy. Evolutionary process describes how branding is a continuous process, and always open for new influences. Transformation means that branding is constantly transformational since it is considered as a means of changing people's associations about the brand. The element of participation describes how taking part in branding is not just being involved in the process, but indeed interaction and combining and co-creating knowledge and skills. Multiplicity describes how branding is very multifaceted, and several stakeholders and actors as well as means and tools of branding need to be taken into consideration in the process. Democracy addresses how

branding is democratic, and it includes issues such as ethical considerations, power, empowerment and ownership. (Jernsand, 2016)



Figure 4. The characteristics of inclusive place branding (adapted from Jernsand, 2016, 14).

Eshuis and Klijn (2012, via Zavattaro, 2018) have identified five participation levels within branding processes: 1) informing, 2) consulting, 3) advising, 4) co-decision, and 5) co-decision and co-production. The first level is very top-down and offers stakeholders little chances of participation. In the second level stakeholders are merely consulted, but the brand is mostly decided by the managers. Advising level allows stakeholders to bring ideas, and managers act as process facilitators. In the fourth level, the administrators facilitate discussion and stakeholders decide on the brand together. In the co-decision and co-production level the public manager is an active facilitator, but the relevant stakeholders are in the centre of the brand process. The level of openness of the branding process lays in the hands of the public manager. The fourth and fifth levels of this model require the public managers to shift from top-down bureaucrats to enablers and facilitators, which will allow the stakeholders to be included in the decision making. (Zavattaro, 2018)

Understanding the values of different stakeholders is one of the key factors in successfully creating a strong brand in the public sector (Gromark & Melin, 2013). For example, the views of the employees are very meaningful to take into consideration. Employees can act as brand ambassadors and through the interaction of external stakeholders – for example customers – they will mold how the brand is viewed externally (Whelan, Davies, Walsh & Bourke, 2010).

Gromark and Melin (2013) argue that there should be a switch from market orientation to brand orientation in the public sector. They see that with market orientation there is too much focus on customers and not enough real interaction, whereas with brand orientation a more holistic and balanced perspective on an organization is provided. Gromark and Melin (2013) also argue that brand orientation prioritizes democratic values instead of focusing on economic ones. The reason why Gromark and Melin (2013) would disregard market orientation is that it does not contribute to the common good – which is the primary goal of a public-sector organisation – but focuses more on individualistic benefits. They conclude that adopting a brand orientation, a public-sector organization can develop a strong brand, and be distinct, visible and relevant for all key stakeholders.

Increasingly, place branding is seen as a public management activity, and therefore it requires the support from the public (Hereźniak, 2017; Kavaratzis, 2012). This means that there is a need to reinforce the communication between stakeholders and the place's authorities, and all in all grant more control to the people (Kavaratzis, 2012). Zavattaro (2018) states that place branding in for example cities is critical due to its relation with reputation management and good governance to increase citizen engagement. She continues that place branding is an essential governance procedure because of the public funds used. Also Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) touch on the matter of public funds; they argue that with a participatory approach taxpayers' money is used better, and all in all, place branding is implemented better.

Zavattaro (2018) notes that the brand already exists with the locals, so in the public sector the place branding can become problematic if the brand is created only using a consulting company. When the brand is co-created with different stakeholder groups it will be more authentic. However, there inevitably needs to be a shift within the public

organization from administrators-as-experts to administrators-as-peers (Zavattaro, 2018). A research by Klijn et al. (2012) indicates that a co-created brand is clearer, which will better enable municipalities to reach one of their main aims; to attract new inhabitants, visitors and companies. Moreover, a study by Maheshwari, Vandewalle and Bamber (de San Eugenio et al., 2019) finds that place branding in fact is the most important factor in terms of growth prospects of a place.

Place branding in the municipal sector is subordinate to political policymaking, as it is usually approved by the municipal government. Sipilä (2018) points out that the ownership of the brand is divided to many actors, and therefore the vagueness of the ownership challenges the idea that it would be possible to create one brand managed by someone. She concludes that place branding is actually *coordinated* by someone rather than *managed* by someone. Sipilä (2018) continues that the coordination of the branding often falls into the hands of the local authorities. de San Eugenio et al. (2019) find that this often enables that public policies are coordinated, their actors are mobilized and communication tools for interacting with residents are created.

Gromark and Melin (2013) highlight the importance of strong employer branding in the public sector, as they need to be considered as an attractive employer compared to the private sector to get talented personnel. Gromark and Melin (2013) even state that the success of attracting gifted and motivated personnel is a matter of survival for the public sector. Also Whelan et al. (2010) identify that one of the aims of public branding is to attract and retain employees, as they are considered as important stakeholders. Therefore, a strong place brand of a municipality will at the same time benefit the employer brand of that municipality.

2.4 Challenges in participatory place branding

The marketing literature has identified several challenges in participatory place branding. One of them is that the residents of a place are not a coherent group, but among them there are many groups having differences in preferences, desires or attitudes (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014). This naturally poses challenges in the participatory place branding process in creating a unified brand for the place. The somewhat same challenge was identified by Henninger, Foster, Alevizou & Frohlich (2016) as they

reference a study about the city of Bradford, UK. The findings suggested that different stakeholders preferred different matters of the place, and this caused conflicting objectives. Henninger et al. (2016) also point out that that challenges in participatory place branding include knowing the stakeholders involved in the process and communicating effectively to different audiences.

Having stakeholders participating in the branding process can be difficult and challenging because there will more likely be disagreement and debate (Houghton & Stevens, 2011 via Kavaratzis, 2012). However, at the same time this can be seen as an asset, as from that debate there can emerge new perspectives and ideas (Kavaratzis, 2012).

As Sipilä (2018) finds, the branding coordination is usually the responsibility of the local authorities. The downside of this is that they often have limited budgets for branding, and they are under the supervision of political decision making. Limited funds can lead to not having enough personnel to fully immerse into participatory approach in branding. Sipilä finds (through Therkelsen & Halkier) that one complicating factor for an organization-wide city branding is the different commitment levels for the branding work in the various sectors of the organization.

2.5 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is created by examining the existing academic literature and drawing the essential concepts from that to support the main purpose of this research. The theoretical framework is presented in figure 5.

It can be argued that the starting point of participatory place branding in the municipal sector is that the municipality must adopt a brand orientation. As was stated by Gromark and Melin (2013) brand orientation fulfills the goal of a public-sector organisation to further the common good, and with brand orientation a stronger, visible and more relevant brand can be developed.

In this theoretical framework the municipality and the stakeholders build the brand in co-creation, in a participatory way. The municipality acts as an initiator in the process,

but during the process their main role is to enable and coordinate the whole process. As Zavattaro (2018) concludes, in brand co-creation the roles of public managers need to be transformed from top-down bureaucrats to facilitators. The stakeholders are the experts in this framework, providing valuable information and creating the essence of the brand. As the process is done in a participatory way, their role builds up to be brand ambassadors in the end.

When this overall process is examined by researching how participatory place branding has been used in the chosen municipalities, conclusions can be drawn as to what benefits and challenges have arisen. Furthermore, at the same time this examination can reveal suggestions for further development of participatory place branding in the municipal sector.

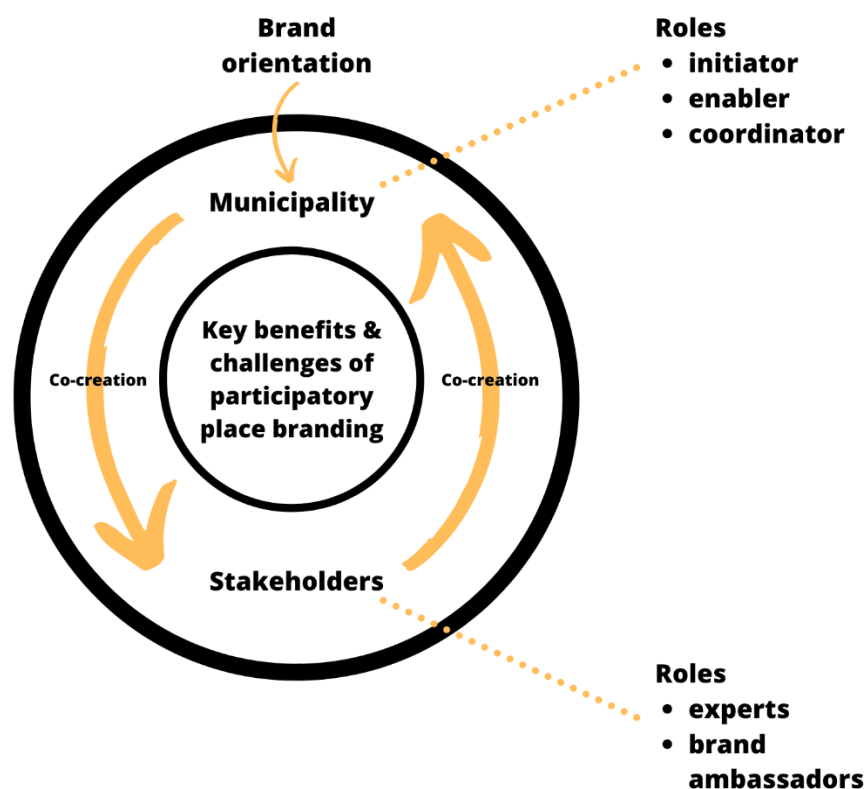


Figure 5. Participatory place branding in the municipal sector.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter there is discussion about the data that has been used; the data is described and justified. Also the chosen research methods are explained. The data of this research is gathered from three semi-structured interviews, and the research is a qualitative one taking a multiple-case study approach.

3.1 Research method

This study is chosen to conduct as a qualitative research, and more specifically using a qualitative case study method. Qualitative research uses a systematic approach in answering questions such as what something is like and why something has happened the way it has (Seers, 2012).

A case study tries to give insight into why certain decisions were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result (Schramm, 1971 via Yin, 2009, 17), so this method was considered appropriate given the nature of this study. What is more, with a case study approach a complex social phenomena can be explored and the holistic and significant characteristics of organizational and managerial processes can be maintained (Yin, 2009, 18).

Also, some of the study's research questions aim to answer "how" or "why" questions and to explain a present circumstance – therefore the case study method will be more relevant (Yin, 2009, 4). The explanatory nature of "how" or "why" questions also justifies the use of case studies as the chosen research method. This is due to the fact that those questions handle interrelationships rather than frequencies or incidence (Yin, 2009, 9).

Although the temporal resources of conducting this research were limited, a decision to include three case studies was made in order to get a more comprehensive view of the topic. Therefore, the study was done using a multiple-case study design. This enhances the chances of doing a better case study, decreases the vulnerability of the study, and the analytic benefits from having more than one case can be significant (Yin, 2009, 53).

3.2 Research process and data collection

The research process followed a multiple-case study approach by Yin (2009, 57), but with some simplifications. In the first stage (define and design) the theory was explored and developed, the three cases were selected, and the data collection method was designed. In the second stage (prepare, collect and analyze) the interviews were conducted, and some preliminary analyzing was made. However, differing from Yin's multiple-case study approach model, individual case reports were not written. In the third stage (analyze and conclude), cross-case conclusions were drawn, theory was modified where needed, implications were developed, and the final report was written.

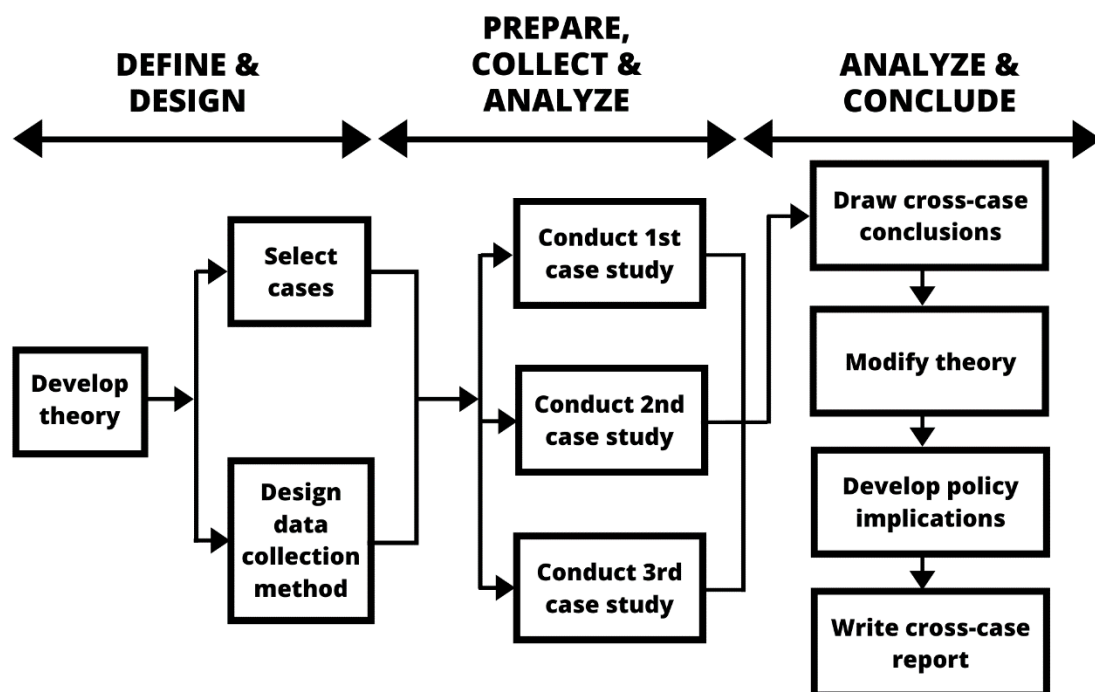


Figure 6. Multiple-case study approach (adapted from Yin, 2009, 57).

For this research three Finnish cities – Pori, Vaasa and Järvenpää – were selected as case municipalities. These cities were selected as they had conducted their place branding in a participatory way during the last couple of years. For the interviews, the persons in charge of their branding processes were chosen, as they were considered to have the most comprehensive view of their participatory place branding process. In Pori all of the employees that had been involved in their participatory branding process from the beginning had already changed jobs. However, the communications

coordinator, with whom the interview was conducted, had been in the branding process from its early stages and was aware of the entirety.

City of Pori is the 10th largest city in Finland with its 84.000 inhabitants (City of Pori's websites, 2020). Pori renewed its brand in a participatory way in 2017 and was one of the first cities in Finland to do it in co-creation with its stakeholders. The participatory place branding process of Pori has won many marketing awards, for example first price in the Finnish Championships of municipal marketing (City of Pori's websites, 2020), making it a good case municipality for this research. City of Vaasa has around 67.000 inhabitants, making it the 14th largest city in Finland (City of Vaasa's websites, 2020). Vaasa conducted its participatory place branding process in 2018. At the same time they renewed the city of Vaasa's, the region of Vaasa's and Visit Vaasa's brands, binding them under the same umbrella. Vaasa benchmarked Pori before they started their participatory branding process. City of Järvenpää has around 43.000 inhabitants (City of Järvenpää's websites, 2020), and it is one of the most recent cities in Finland having renewed their brand in a participatory way. They conducted their branding process during 2019.

The empirical data for this research was collected using semi-structured interviews. In semi-structured interviews the structure of the questions is not very strict; there is a pre-thought list of questions, but the order of the questions can vary in every interview, and the discussion can flow quite freely (Fylan, 2005). This allows the interviewees to more freely express themselves. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are considered good when exploring "why" or "how" questions (Fylan, 2005), and as the sub-questions of this research include these questions, the use of semi-structured interviews is justifiable.

All the interviews were chosen to conduct via phone. This was done because the distance between the interviewer and the interviewees was rather long and arranging face-to-face interviews would have been more challenging given the time resources available to conduct this study.

The interviews were conducted between 5th March and 23rd March 2020. They were conducted in Finnish, as both the interviewer and the interviewees are Finnish

speaking. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed in order to be able to better analyze the data. The interview questions translated in English can be found in appendix 1.

INTERVIEWEE	METHOD	DATE	DURATION (h:mm:ss)
Communications Manager, City of Vaasa	Telephone interview	5th March 2020	1:01:21
Director of Communications, City of Järvenpää	Telephone interview	6th March 2020	0:44:19
Communications Coordinator, City of Pori	Telephone interview	23rd March 2020	0:42:23

Table 1. Interview information.

3.3 Data analyzing

In empirical research the findings are obtained making concrete observations about the subject and analyzing and measuring it. In empirical research the collected data is in the centre and is the foundation of conducting the research. (University of Jyväskylä, 2015a) The data is also analyzed qualitatively. The aim of the qualitative analysis is to structure the quality, characteristics and meanings of the research object holistically (University of Jyväskylä, 2015b).

The questions for the semi-structured interviews were based on the theoretical framework. The main themes include the benefits and challenges in the participatory place branding, how the overall process is conducted, and how the process could be developed. The collected data was analyzed using these themes but also using themes based on the theory. The answers were sorted under each theme, they were compared against each other, and then cross-case conclusions were drawn. The themes were illustrated using quotations, as it helps keeping the analysis grounded in the data (Seers, 2012). Using the themes and the interview questions based on the themes aims at finding out benefits and challenges of participatory place branding in the municipal

sector. The nature of the research is abductive as the conclusions are drawn based on the data and the theoretical framework.

4 EMPIRICAL STUDY

This chapter analyzes the empirical data that has been obtained through the semi-structured interviews and reflects the findings against the theoretical background presented in chapter 2. It describes how participatory place branding has been used in the three case municipalities, and also addresses the benefits and challenges that arise from the data. Furthermore, interpretation about future development of participatory place branding in the municipal sector is made.

The chapter is structured according to the themes that arise from the research problems. The citations used in the empirical analysis are direct citations from the interviewees; they have however been translated into English and extra support words have been removed.

4.1 Using participatory place branding in the municipal sector

It can be concluded from the data that municipalities have begun to understand that branding is nowadays essential also in the municipal sector. All three representatives point out the importance of branding when municipalities are competing in attracting new residents, companies and tourists.

“The reason why we want to brand is that we want to succeed also in the future. We are a growing city, and we want to continue to be a growing city. We get good new taxpayers, residents and businesses, and of course it is really important that the residents living here are very proud of Järvenpää and want to remain here. It is perhaps even more important than getting new ones (residents) that the existing want to stay, it is very essential.” (Director of Communications, City of Järvenpää)

“[...] the municipal sector may have only now awakened to the fact that oh, we must also compete for customers and residents, just like companies.” (Communications Coordinator, City of Pori)

It was also addressed that branding in the public sector differs greatly from that of the private sector and especially from commercial products and services. This makes branding in the municipal sector more challenging.

“Branding is of course a bit different, as our product is so different. When you think about commercial products, the branding is a little simpler there. In the municipal sector we have such a broad range of services, so the brand is a bit more fragmented and challenging.” (Director of Communications, City of Järvenpää)

Data analysis reveals that participatory place branding is seen rather similarly in the case municipalities. What is stressed in the answers is that in the participatory approach stakeholders are truly included in the process, not just seemingly. The main reason the three case municipalities decided to do their place branding in a participatory way is that they wanted the brand to be authentic and represent the views of the residents and other stakeholders. The core initiative for starting the branding process often stemmed from the willingness to brighten the municipality’s overall image and from the aim to unify several different logos of the municipality’s services under the same brand umbrella. As there might not have been a clear brand before, the different functions of the municipality – for example events, community colleges – had over time created their own logos and layouts. When the branding process was over, and these functions appeared more coherent with the municipality’s overall brand, there was even amazement among residents that certain things are operated by their city:

“And especially when we started using it (the new brand), the feedback from the residents might have been like ‘I didn’t know that this is a city activity’.” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)

It is evident that all of the participatory place branding processes examined here were strongly based on the municipalities’ strategies. The municipal strategy and its main themes were reviewed already in the beginning stages of the branding, and throughout the process the findings and opinions were reflected against the strategy. It can be seen, in a way, that the municipal strategy creates the frames for the participatory place

branding process, although the contents of the brand are co-created with the stakeholders.

“We have a good strategy, so we also constantly reflected against our new city strategy what our visions for the future are. So also the target of always wanting to be a little better, although we are good already, is of course included in the brand concept.” (Director of Communications, City of Järvenpää)

As Gromark and Melin (2013) have described, brand orientation puts democratic values first and enables real interaction. It can be concluded that the case municipalities have adopted a brand orientation. This has become evident when the participatory place branding processes of these three municipalities have been analyzed. According to the analysis, the role of the management and especially their will on doing the place branding in a participatory way, has been central. They have been able to convince others of the benefits of the participatory approach and have been the driving force to continue the inclusiveness through the whole process.

“Luckily, at that time our chief had the understanding that inclusion is how these things need to be done in this world. That it achieves the best results. I have come to understand that she had a strong state of mind, she was able to convince others that it should be done this way, and that is how it came to be.” (Communications Coordinator, City of Pori)

Inclusiveness naturally requires more time and resources and in some cases the whole participatory process has been questioned, as can be seen from the following quote:

“[...] at some point someone even said if we should forget about resident participation because it takes up so much resources. Then I said that this is the most important thing of all [...] so then it quickly turned around that we will just somehow find the time.” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)

4.1.1 Resident participation

All three municipalities that are used as case studies in this research have conducted their participatory place branding process quite similarly. The process has begun by doing a competitive bidding, and through that finding a marketing agency as a partner for the process. The foundation phase of the process has included researching the history of the municipality and collecting basic information. This was often done in-house and not yet involving stakeholders outside the municipality's organisation. The next phase has included participating stakeholders online. Cities of Pori and Järvenpää had separate websites (poriuudistuu.fi and jarvenpaani.fi) for their branding processes, which were open for anyone to visit. City of Vaasa had an online community, which was open for anybody but required registration. In the next phase of the participatory place branding process there has been more face-to-face interaction with the stakeholders, for example in the form of workshops, interviews and pop-up stands. From the data gathered from these stages different brand alternatives have been formulated, and the stakeholders have had the opportunity to vote for their favourite. Finally, the final version of the brand has been formulated, and then it has been approved by the municipality government.

It seems very important to include the participatory approach already in the competitive bidding stage. This allows for the marketing agencies to beforehand think about how the participation will be executed in different stages of the process. And as there is a clear plan about participation already in the beginning of the place branding process, it will allow the municipality to better organize their available resources (time and personnel) for the upcoming stages. It can be seen from the data analysis that the case municipalities have all valued the participatory approach already in the competitive bidding stage, and it has been one of the most decisive things when selecting the marketing agency as a partner for the process.

“[...] then we started to cooperate with the marketing agency, it was already essential in the call for tenders that there was a desire to involve residents. That it is one of the most important parts of the (brand) planning that they are closely involved in it.” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)

“We of course invited tenders for this. We had an idea about branding, we tendered the cooperation partners, who presented their inclusion plans already in the competitive bidding stage. Who had the best inclusion plan was a very important decisive factor.” (Director of Communications, City of Järvenpää)

The analysis of the data clearly shows that using web-based participation was central in the place branding processes. Through these separate websites the municipalities were able to collect valuable data for their place branding, and the stakeholders had a chance to participate from the early stages. City of Pori had a questionnaire on their website, which formulated a Pori story for each respondent, but at the same time provided information for the branding process:

“It was kind of a fun thing for the residents, or it had fun value too. But then there were so-called data points in the survey, which were collected. For example, on the bases of that, we got the primary colours for the brand. So it was used as a basis for the design, that this is what the people of Pori think.” (Communications Coordinator, City of Pori)

City of Vaasa had an online community for their participatory place branding process, which was limited to a certain number of participants, and required registration. They “recruited” people to join through social media and press advertising and received 80 participants. The members of the online community were given weekly tasks, which were voluntary to answer – they were asked to tell something about themselves, about their municipality and vote for the different visuals. The participants of the online community also had a chance to follow the different stages of the place branding process and communicate with the marketing agency and the municipality’s branding team, who also participated in the online community. Out of the 80 members of the online community around 50 took actively part, and the rest settled for following the process silently. Overall, web-based participation was seen good, as it was not place or time bound:

“On the other hand, it gave the opportunity, that had it been more place bound, then maybe the peak year families with children had not participated. That, in turn, made it possible to do so much or so little, that they could just follow, and

just to be aware that this was coming [...].” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)

The analysis shows that face-to-face interaction with the stakeholders was also much used, and it provided added information for the branding process. City of Järvenpää conducted interviews with selected persons, from whom they specifically wanted to find out opinions about Järvenpää’s identity and success factors. They also were present in different events around the city, discussing and receiving feedback from the residents. City of Vaasa spent three days in a local shopping centre showcasing different visuals and colours for their upcoming brand, discussing with the residents and collecting feedback and information for the branding process. City of Pori opened a “pop-up marketing agency” in the city centre, and they published a front-page “job-search ad” in their local newspaper, looking for 85.000 brand experts. The pop-up marketing agency was open for 9 days, and everyone visiting could tell their opinion about four different brand alternatives and discuss with the brand designers. According to the analysis, face-to-face interaction was seen important, and not only for the branding process. At the same time the residents had the chance to talk about municipality’s other affairs to the municipality’s officials.

“I think it is a very important prioritization that we disembarked and discussed also about public transport, waste management and whatever people wanted to talk about. It was all in all important that we were there in the shopping centre and people could talk and tell their opinion about the visuals and discuss other things, and eat the toffee we offered.” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)

As the essence of the municipality had been assembled from the stakeholders through different participation methods, there were different brand alternatives created by the marketing agencies. These alternatives were then displayed online and often also in pop-up stands, and the residents had a chance to vote for their favourite, and at the same time provide additional feedback. After the voting, all of the data received throughout the process was summarized, and a finalized version of the brand was created together with the marketing agency and the municipality’s officials. The final brand was then approved by the municipal government.

The launching of the new brand included same kind of elements in all of the case municipalities. There were press releases, media infos, advertising campaigns and social media visibility. All three municipalities had an event where they distributed cloth bags with new visuals and talked to the residents about the new brand. City of Pori released merchandise with new brand visuals on sale, and city of Järvenpää plans to do the same in the near future.

The analysis shows that the case municipalities are willing to continue to participate their stakeholders even after the initial place branding process is finished. Cities of Pori and Vaasa have already had a couple of participatory processes, that are linked to their brand. City of Pori has started to use participatory budgeting, and city of Vaasa had an image campaign which was done in a participatory way. As the participatory place branding process of Järvenpää has only recently been finished, they have not yet had the time to do new participatory processes relating to their brand. However, they are planning to use participation in the near future. The participatory place branding process is still continuing in the city of Järvenpää internally, as they will unify the different logos within the city organization under the same brand umbrella.

“In all that we do, including this upcoming campaign, the starting point is first here in our own residents. That is how it will be done. That we first believe it ourselves.” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)

4.1.2 Personnel participation

The personnel in the three case municipalities was included in the participatory place branding process rather well. They were often part of the starting stage; doing background research and communicating their views of the place. Throughout the process there was a lot of internal communication about how the branding process is proceeding, and the personnel was encouraged to take part for example in the different votings of the process. There were also separate questionnaires directed for the personnel, and these answers were naturally included in the overall data of the process.

“But then when those stages came in which residents were involved, the staff was kept involved at all times. The same participation options were

communicated to staff; for example the whole staff was sent a text message, and that is in principle only for crisis situations. So a text message was sent so that they would participate.” (Communications Coordinator, City of Pori)

There was also some face-to-face interaction involved with parts of the personnel. The branding process was profoundly looked over with different departments to create understanding why the process is necessary and how it will benefit the whole municipality, including these departments. This face-to-face inclusion was seen important to decrease the possible resistance and to make different parts of the municipality’s organization more committed towards the branding process. Also the executive teams of the municipalities were kept regularly up to date on how the branding process is proceeding. What was pointed out was that the branding process was not just coordinated by the municipalities’ marketing and communications’ departments, but the brand steering groups included people from all over the municipalities’ organizations. This is in line with the view of Ind and Bjerke (2007) who underline that place branding should be an organization-wide process.

The brand was launched to the personnel usually by having a separate event or presenting the new brand as part of a staff seminar. In these events the participatory place branding process was gone through and explained why it has been done, who have been involved and what was the initial purpose of the whole process. City of Järvenpää participated their personnel in the launching stage, as part of the staff went out to the streets handing out new brand merchandise and talking to residents about the new brand.

Although politicians are not part of the municipality’s personnel, their role is central as decision makers of the municipality’s affairs. Therefore their inclusion in the participatory branding process is touched on in this chapter. The analysis shows that the councilors are considered as major stakeholders, as they have broad networks and are central in communicating the municipality’s brand. The political decision makers were included in the participatory place branding by keeping them up to date with how the process is proceeding, encouraging them into taking part, and having separate brand workshops and votings for them.

4.2 Key benefits of participatory place branding in the municipal sector

The data analysis clearly shows that one of the main benefits of using participatory place branding in the municipal sector is that it produces a brand that is considered “genuine”. All of the interviewees stressed that if the brand is created only using a marketing agency, the result is not believable, authentic, and it will create less commitment. This is congruent with the findings of Zenker and Erfgen (2014) that using participatory branding the stakeholders are more committed and loyal towards the brand. If the brand is not authentic and genuine, it will be weaker.

“If it is just some hypocrite brand made by a marketing agency that does not really resonate with the heart and soul, and the residents are not feeling it, then it does not carry far.” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)

“No matter what thing it is, inclusion works. People are committed to it and are excited about it, that it is not something given from above but done together. The end result is something that pleases most and people experience it as their own.” (Communications Coordinator, City of Pori)

By using participatory place branding the three case municipalities have been able to create brand ambassadors, and this has resulted in a wider visibility for example in social media. A good example of this are the actions of Pori when they launched their new brand. For their brand they created a specific font, Pori Sans, which is available for anybody to use non-commercially. As they launched their brand, they sent several T-shirts to famous people of Pori customized with their names (see picture 1). Two months after the launch they sent around 13.000 “love letters” to former residents of Pori to get them to fall in love with Pori again and to move back there. Furthermore, one year after the launch of the new brand, Pori launched their own fragrance, Eau de Pori. These actions were targeted at creating brand ambassadors for Pori and to create hype, and they succeeded in doing that. All in all, the case municipalities seem to have understood the value of brand ambassadors, and the participatory branding process has supported their creation.

“[...] the brand won’t work if the residents are not behind it, if the residents don’t deliver those messages, so that’s why it needs to start from there. These are the best brand ambassadors.” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)



Picture 1. Famous citizens of Pori presenting their customized Pori T-shirts (Rajala, 2018).

One of the benefits that arose from the data was that when a participatory approach is used, it decreases the resistance among stakeholders towards the new brand. Although the new brand can never satisfy everybody and there will always be some criticism, the amount of negative feedback was rather minimal, which was even surprising:

“[...] we had already thought about answers for the criticism beforehand, but they were not needed. We could see the benefit of the residents already having seen it, that they had been allowed to be involved, they had had the opportunity to influence, so in a way the criticism was so minimal that we were a bit amazed, but this is how it was supposed to go.” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)

Data analysis reveals that the participatory branding was considered to be useful also for the municipality’s managers, as they were able to receive feedback along the way, and reassurance that the process is heading towards the right direction. Participation also minimized the possible mistakes that would have been made, had the stakeholders not been included. As there were tens or even hundreds of “branding professionals”

involved, the pitfalls could be avoided beforehand. One concrete example of this is from the city of Vaasa. They had designed several symbols that represent different characteristics of Vaasa, and the residents had a chance to comment on the symbols during the participatory branding process (see picture 2). Based on the feedback they could spot the symbols that needed adjustment and find out the ones that are liked.

“For example, there were two symbols that not everybody understood what they depicted. They were full of red stickers with a question mark or the word “hmm”. They were not understood, and they were modified. [...] It was really valuable that this doesn’t work, that it is either removed or done again.” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)



Picture 2. Residents marking their feelings about City of Vaasa’s planned symbols (Forsén, 2020).

All in all, the respondents are very satisfied that they chose to conduct their place branding processes in a participatory way, which can be seen from the following quote:

“I would definitely never make a brand concept like that again (only with a marketing agency), but the process needs to be done in a participatory way,

especially in the public sector and the city, so that it is genuine and the residents affiliate with it. There is a certain common pride that this is our own brand and this is what Järvenpää has chosen, that they have been involved in doing this, that they have influenced this themselves.” (Director of Communications, City of Järvenpää)

4.3 Challenges of participatory place branding in the municipal sector

The data analysis shows that the most challenging matter in participatory place branding is the amount of time it requires. Having the stakeholders truly participating in branding naturally takes up more time, and additionally it ties the staff involved very strictly into the process. In addition, it was admitted that the participatory approach is more demanding; the easier way would be just to create the brand with the management and the marketing agency.

“Of course it took time [...]. It just took more resources. The fact that we were three days at the Rewell Center meant that no other work was then done, but of course that (branding) was the priority.” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)

“It is challenging. It would be easy just to sit down with a marketing agency and think whether this is good. And listen a bit to the manager, that he doesn’t like this, this needs to be changed. In a way that would be a faster process.” (Director of Communications, City of Järvenpää)

Although it was acknowledged that the participatory approach is more time-consuming, the process was considered to have been very rewarding. Also, the clear view of the respondents was that the participatory way creates a better outcome, and they would not anymore do public sector branding without participation.

One of the challenges that arose from the data is that branding in general requires quite a lot of background work prior to the process. Arguments need to be made that branding is something that needs to be done and that it is beneficiary, the

municipality's personnel and decision makers need to be committed to the process, and the money spent on the process needs to be justified.

“Of course there is always this perspective that why is the city putting money into this. It is always the perspective you get to answer, and it is clear that it arises whenever it comes to money.” (Director of Communications, City of Järvenpää)

Although all of the case municipalities did get a good number of stakeholders to participate in the branding process, data analysis reveals that to some extent it was seen difficult to get stakeholders into coming to separate branding events – for example workshops. Taking the branding to existing events – for example having a pop-up stand in a music happening – where the people were already present, was seen more effective at times. Furthermore, the role of communication was seen very important in getting people to participate, and altogether to become aware of the participatory place branding process. Without sufficient marketing and communication about the ongoing process, there is a risk that there will not be enough participation, as the stakeholders are not even aware of it.

“[...] not a lot came to all of the workshops, so we would have hoped for more. To some came (enough people), so getting people to the scene is perhaps a bit challenging. But it works well that you go there where the people already are, so that is always a good option.” (Director of Communications, City of Järvenpää)

“Plan well, communicate openly and allow for genuine participation. And then invest as much as you can so that people will show up. It will be good.” (Communications Coordinator, City of Pori)

As participatory place branding is still rather new and not much used, it has required a certain change in the attitudes and behaviour of the municipalities' managers and politicians. There could be seen some sort of a culture shock among the political decision makers during the participatory place branding process, as it became obvious that they were not the ones making the final decision about the brand. It was also addressed that the managers need to be open to in a way give up their power in the

process, and this of course can feel like a challenge to some. But as was stated by Aitken and Campelo (2011), this type of bottom-up approach – allowing the stakeholders to have the power – will create a more authentic brand and more committed stakeholders.

“All you have to do is give up a certain power or dare to give power to others. It takes courage, but it will give better results.” (Communications Coordinator, City of Pori)

“[...] participation and genuine participation is quite new in cities, so there was some wonderment from political decision makers, that are they not the ones making the decision after all. [...] It was perhaps a bit of a wonderment on that side, that oh, we are really letting the city residents decide on this.” (Director of Communications, City of Järvenpää)

According to the data analysis there appears to have been most resistance to change internally in the municipality's organization. Parts of the staff were reluctant to give up on the existing logos and visuals and questioned the need to change them. This required for the members of the brand steering group to have profound discussions with the different departments of the organization to increase understanding how the branding process and its more coherent end result will benefit all of the municipality's operations. This type of inclusion was seen crucial to ensure the personnel's commitment towards the branding process and the new brand.

“[...] it benefits everyone that we look coherent. Then we had these discussions, and for some it was more painful to give up their unit's logo, and some felt that this is a really good thing.” (Communications Manager, City of Vaasa)

“Most of them who wanted to hold on to the old were amongst the city's personnel. That why, for example the logo, that why does it need to be changed. So it was really important to involve them.” (Director of Communications, City of Järvenpää)

Although the case municipalities seem to have used a lot of internal communication to make their personnel aware of the participatory place branding process and to encourage them into taking part, there nevertheless was some criticism amongst the staff that they had not been involved enough. The branding process had been so intensely targeted at the residents, and the personnel was considered to be part of city's residents, so there had perhaps been less focus on the personnel in specific.

4.4 Developing participatory place branding further

The analysis reveals some aspects how participatory place branding could be developed further in the municipal sector. What is essential is that the participatory aspect should be taken into account already in the competitive bidding stage. This will ensure that the whole process is designed keeping in mind the participatory approach. Also, a comprehensive inclusion plan needs to be drafted already in the beginning stages of the branding process. It was pointed out that this plan can and should be changed during the process when needed – if for example the planned participatory methods do not seem to be working – but all in all an overall plan should be done.

Another development is that the municipalities should beforehand think about what parts of their brand, especially the visual elements, they will allow for their stakeholders to use – for example the companies and unions of the place. If this is not thought ahead, it can cause confusion and negative feedback.

“What could have been done differently is that we could have thought earlier how different companies and unions can use our brand. Now we have gotten ideas afterwards.” (Communications Coordinator, City of Pori)

As was discussed in chapter 4.3, it was somewhat considered more profitable to take pop-up branding stands into existing events where people already were present rather than have separate branding events. The analysis shows that the case municipalities would have done more personal interviews and face-to-face interaction with the stakeholders if they had had more time. Taking these findings into account for developing the participatory place branding, there needs to be enough time reserved

for face-to-face interaction with the stakeholders and the time and place for that interaction needs to be well planned.

5 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discusses the main findings and conclusions of the study. It gives answers to the research questions and presents the new information that has been obtained. The theoretical contribution of this study is explained as the results are reflected against the theory presented in chapter 2 to find out how they support or differ from earlier research. Also the modified theoretical framework based on the study's findings is presented. Managerial implications are given, and they express how the results of this study can be made use of in the municipal sector. Furthermore, limitations of the study are discussed, as how reliable the results are and what the restrictions of the research are. Finally, directions for future research are suggested.

5.1 Answers to the research questions

The purpose of this research is to study participatory place branding in the municipal sector. This is done by answering the main research question “What are the key benefits and challenges of participatory place branding in the municipal sector?”, and sub-questions “How is participatory place branding used in the municipal sector?” and “How could participatory place branding be developed further?”. To answer these research questions, three Finnish municipalities, which had done their place branding in a participatory way, were chosen for closer examination. The empirical data for this study was obtained by doing three semi-structured interviews, and the data was compared against the existing theory and conclusions were drawn. This chapter discusses the findings of the study and offers answers to the research questions.

This research clearly shows that it is beneficiary for municipalities to use participatory place branding; there are a lot of benefits, and the emerged challenges were relatively easy to overcome, especially with good planning. The main benefit is that with a participatory approach the place brand will be more authentic. This is in line with the findings of Zavattaro (2018) and Medway et al. (2015) When the brand is more believable, it will create brand ambassadors among the stakeholders. This can be seen as one of the main targets of the participatory place brand process, and one of its biggest benefits.

Based on the findings it can be concluded that people were content with even having the chance to participate and to follow the branding process. For example the online branding community of city of Vaasa had 80 participants, of whom around 50 took part actively in discussions. Nevertheless, everyone was given an equal chance to participate, but some members of the community were just happy monitoring the process silently from the background. The possibility to be part of the branding process clearly reduced the criticism towards the brand, and this can be seen as one of the major benefits of participatory place branding.

The benefits included getting continuous feedback from the stakeholders, which not only strengthened the brand steering group's beliefs of doing the right things, but also enabled to mold planned brand elements when necessary. The feedback and data received from the stakeholders was considered very valuable, and not only the feedback about the brand; face-to-face interaction with the residents allowed them to discuss with the municipality's managers and workers also about other affairs of the municipality.

It can be concluded that the main challenge of participatory place branding is that it takes up more time and resources compared to non-participatory place branding. It can also be challenging to get people committed to the process and to get permission to use money on branding. However, as Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) find, with participatory place branding the taxpayers' money is used better and place branding is implemented better.

Based on the findings, one of the challenges of participatory place branding is that it requires a certain attitude-change in the municipality's management and in the political decision makers: in the process all of the power is given to the stakeholders. This proved to be at times even a culture shock. Also, there was some challenge with letting go with the old brand, especially inside the municipalities' organizations. However, as the process was done in a participatory way, also the personnel was included, and this challenge often resolved with thorough discussions where the benefits of branding were gone through.

A slight challenge was considered to be getting participants in the separate branding events. Taking the participatory place branding to already existing events was at times seen as a better alternative, as people were already present there.

The participatory place branding processes of the three case municipalities are rather similar. As an answer to the first sub-question “How is participatory place branding used in the municipal sector?” this study suggests that the process roughly consists of five stages: starting stage, web participation, face-to-face interaction, brand alternatives, and final stage (see figure 7). The starting stage included background research, and this was mostly done internally. Web participation included for example online communities and web-based questionnaires, which mapped the place’s identity and its characteristics. The next stage, face-to-face interaction used pop-up stands, being present at a local shopping centre and even creating a “marketing agency” for a few weeks. With the data gathered from these previous stages there were a few brand alternatives created, and stakeholders could vote for their favourite. Based on the feedback received from the voting, the final brand was created, and it was approved by the local municipal government.



Figure 7. Stages of participatory place branding.

The findings of this study offer some points of how participatory place branding can be developed further in the municipal sector, so the second sub-question “How could participatory place branding be developed further?” can be answered as follows. First and foremost, the participatory approach needs to be taken into account already in the competitive bidding stage. This allows for the chosen marketing agency to prepare and

adjust their plans for the process accordingly. Also, it is essential to have a well-thought inclusion plan already in the beginning of the branding process.

Based on this study's findings, as an answer to the second sub-question it can be suggested that there should be more dismounting to already existing events – such as Christmas fairs and night of the arts – during the participatory place branding process. The upside of this is that the people are already there, as it was somewhat considered a challenge at times to get stakeholders into participating in separate branding events. Also, as a suggestion to develop participatory place branding, the using of the finished brand amongst different stakeholders – for example companies and unions – should be considered before the process. This prevents from creating confusion as there are clear guidelines given already as the new brand is launched.

5.2 Theoretical contribution

This chapter presents the study's findings and discusses how they support or differ from earlier research. The findings are results of examining the theoretical background presented in chapter 2 and comparing it with the empirical data of this study. Key findings of this study are highlighted in figure 8.

The messages conveyed by the locals are regarded as more believable and more authentic by the external audiences (see for example Braun et al., 2013 and Rebelo et al., 2019). The findings of this study support this, as the stakeholders were more committed towards the brand and the municipalities were able to create brand ambassadors even during the branding process. In his study Sevin (2011) discusses the morals and ethics of place branding, and even poses a question if it alienates residents from their own cities. Based on this study, it is not something that one should be worried about if the participatory approach is used in the place branding. On the contrary, participatory place branding appeared to make the residents more attached.

Rebelo et al. (2019) find that non-participatory place branding has many times resulted even in counter-branding protests by residents, and moreover stirred up criticism by many scholars. As is stated by de San Eugenio et al. (2019) the participatory approach reduces criticism among the stakeholders towards the new brand, and the findings of

this study support this theory. The attitudes towards the new place brand were generally positive, the brand was embraced, and the low amount of criticism was at times even surprising.

When the participatory place branding processes of the three case municipalities are compared to the existing theory, similarities can be found. Especially the framework of a truly participatory approach for place branding by Zenker and Erfgen (2014) (see figure 2) seems fitting. In particular the first stage is fulfilled in these processes, to some extent also the second stage, and there are hints about the future development towards the third stage, as the participatory approach seems to be continuing for example in the form of participatory budgeting.

Based on the findings, the means for participation were well planned beforehand the place branding, and the planning was seen essential for the success of the process. This is in line with for example Kavaratzis (2012) and Braun et al. (2013) that stakeholder participation should be planned for every stage of the place branding, and the stakeholders should have many opportunities to take part. What was highlighted in the data was that the participation should be genuine and not just seeming, and with good planning the genuine participation can be ensured.

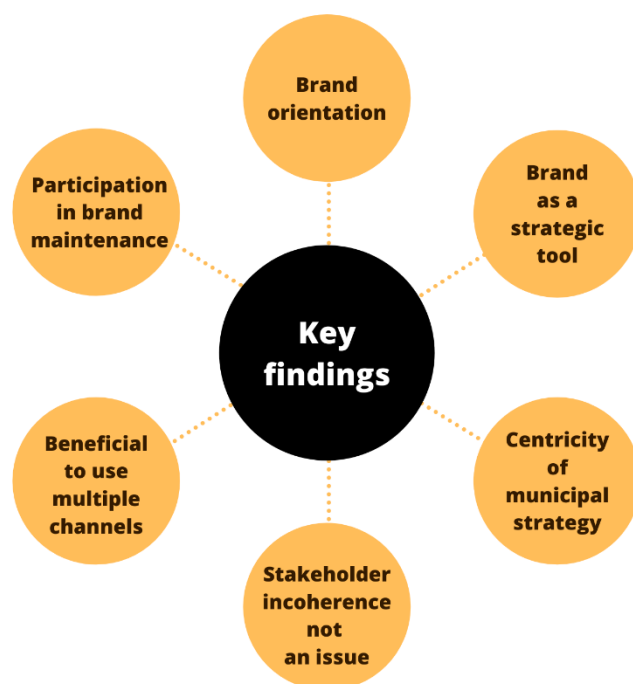


Figure 8. Key findings of the study.

In the theoretical framework of this study brand orientation was pointed out to be important for participatory place branding in the municipal sector. The findings of this study support this, and even highlight its central role. This seems justified as brand orientation focuses on the common good rather than individualistic benefits (Gromark & Melin, 2013), and the main aim of participatory place branding is to produce a place brand, which will benefit the whole community. Furthermore, with brand orientation true interaction can be achieved (Gromark & Melin, 2013), and municipalities should strive towards this in all their operations.

It is evident that participatory place branding requires more time and resources than the traditional, non-participatory branding. However, based on this study the effort put into the process is very rewarding and the outcome well worth it. Hereźniak (2017, through Florek and Insch, 2008) identifies that place attachment is one of the critical factors in creating a strong, citizen-inclusive place brand. Based on the empirical data the case municipalities have been able to create more commitment with their participatory place branding processes, and as the residents feel more committed they are more connected and attached to their place.

The research by de San Eugenio et al. (2019) strengthens the role of public administration in place branding, and the findings of this study support this. It is clear that the municipality management is the enabler and coordinator of the process, but the importance of that role has not been emphasized in the previous academic literature. Therefore another key finding from this study is the crucial role of municipality's management to ensure that the branding is done in a participatory way. As was showcased in chapter 4, the role of management was central in ensuring that the branding process is done in a participatory way; during the process there were suggestions to forget about inclusion as it takes so much time, but due to the management's convincing and justification the branding continued as a participatory process.

Nowadays as municipalities strive for remaining profitable and vibrant, they need to adopt a more competitive attitude in racing for residents, companies and tourists. This became evident in the empirical data. As is pointed out by Gromark and Melin (2013) brands are still rarely considered as strategic tools in municipalities' management, but

this is something that should change. With a strong and visible place brand a municipality can distinguish itself from its competitors, and this type of brand can be developed by adopting a brand orientation (Gromark & Melin, 2013).

Based on this study the municipal strategy is very important in participatory place branding, and it is reflected against throughout the whole process. It can be concluded that the municipal strategy creates the frames for the brand, but the stakeholders create its contents. In this sense it is interesting to compare this finding to the statement by Eshuis et al. (Hereźniak, 2017) that marketers do not control the brand. This is true also in participatory place branding but based on the findings the municipal strategy does *guide* the brand to a certain direction. The importance of municipal strategy was not evident in the existing theory, so this finding provides new information to the field of participatory place branding.

Zenker and Erfgen (2014) bring up that stakeholders have different and conflicting preferences, desires and attitudes – meaning that they are not a coherent group, and this could prove to be a challenge in participatory place branding. The same challenge was identified by Henninger et al. (2016). Of course, all participatory place branding processes differ from each other, and some might face different challenges than the other. However, none of the three case municipalities identified the differences of opinions or attitudes amongst stakeholders as a challenge, which is an interesting find.

As with all brands, a place brand is never final, but it lives and transforms with its residents. Therefore, it is important to maintain the participatory approach continuously, and develop the place brand in co-creation. As Klijn et al. (2012) find, brand creation and maintenance is a process where stakeholders act not only as co-creators but are also constantly involved in recreating and implementing the brand. Based on the findings of this study the participatory approach to place branding seems to continue even after the initial place branding process is finished, and the importance of stakeholder involvement is considered important also in the future.

Based on the new information obtained from this study the original theoretical framework is modified according to these key findings. The modified theoretical framework is presented in figure 9.

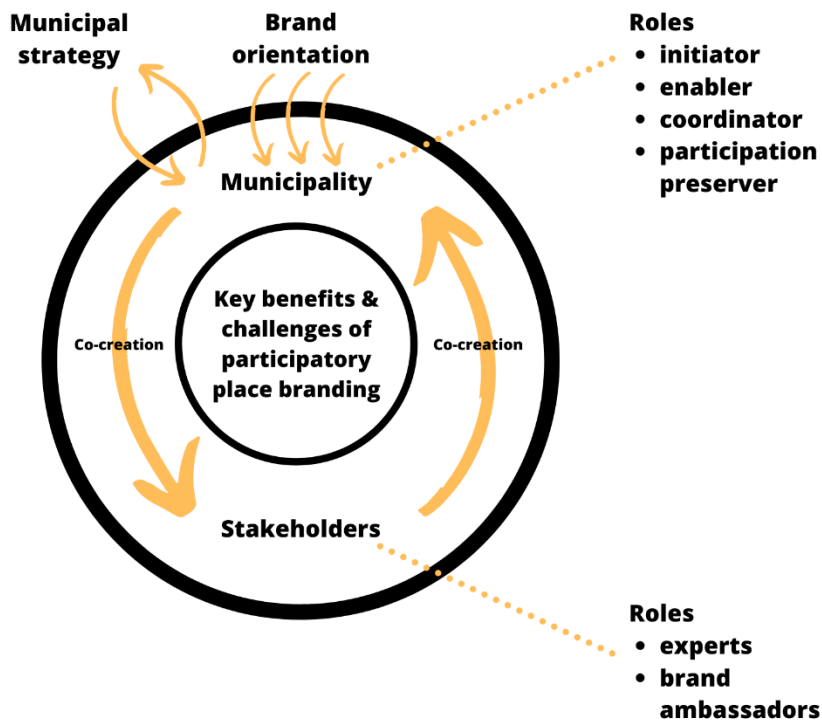


Figure 9. Modified theoretical framework.

5.3 Managerial implications

Nowadays municipalities need to be more competitive in attracting residents, companies and tourists – which makes the place brand even more essential. Municipalities should more appreciate the brand as a strategic tool in achieving competitive advantage in their operation and developing their municipality. For example by examining the framework by Jernsand (2016) (see figure 4) the using of brand as a strategic tool can better be understood.

The importance of including stakeholders in the municipal sector is emphasized in the findings, and the participatory approach makes the stakeholders more committed towards their place and the brand. Therefore, municipalities need to increase participation in their operations, including their place branding. The residents' right to participate in the activities of their municipality is already written in the Local Government Act of Finland (Finlex, 410/2015, section 22), and the significance of this is continuously growing. As is pointed out by Sevin (2011), nowadays the audiences

are not willing to passively accept messages, but they insist on active participation throughout the process.

The results of the study show that participatory place branding was strongly linked with the municipal strategy, as the different stages of the process were continuously projected against the strategy. Therefore, this is something that municipalities need to take into consideration when thinking about their branding. The strategy needs to be up to date and reflect the municipality and its objectives accordingly. Given this, the municipalities should consider constructing also their municipal strategy in participation with their stakeholders. The municipal strategy is the cornerstone of all the municipality's operations and when it is constructed in a way that reflects the municipality and its stakeholders, the foundations are on a solid base.

As a municipality is beginning their participatory place branding process, the municipal managers need to be ready to adjust their roles and be open for giving up some of their power. As is explained by Zavattaro (2018), the co-creation involves transforming the managers from top-down bureaucrats to more of enablers of the process. The managers need to be ready to act as coordinators and find ways to include stakeholders into making decisions.

On a more concrete level, the municipalities must take the participatory approach into account even before the competitive bidding stage. The plan of doing the place branding in a participatory way should be included into the offer request, and preferably ask for the marketing agencies to give their plans of participation in their offers. Before the beginning stage of the participatory place branding process, a well-thought inclusion plan must be drafted. This allows for taking the participatory approach into account in every stage of the process. Also, the resources needed for the place branding must be carefully planned before the process, which will ensure that there is enough time and personnel to complete the process properly.

It is advisory to use multiple channels in the place branding to include stakeholders. This way people with different ages and life stages are better reached, and it is ensured that as many as possible have the opportunity to take part in the branding process. Web-based participation nowadays reaches most of the people, but it can exclude older

citizens with no experience of online activities. Therefore, although web-based participation is central, also face-to-face interaction is needed. In face-to-face interaction stakeholders can bring up also other matters of the municipality, and these discussions can provide valuable information. The time and place of the face-to-face interaction should also be carefully planned. It can sometimes be more beneficial to attend already existing events, where people already are, rather than having separate branding events to which participants are invited.

As the personnel is an important part of delivering the municipality's brand, they must be well included in the place branding process. The reasons for branding need to be communicated clearly and comprehensively to increase understanding and reduce the possible resistance. The personnel must be kept informed of the place branding process continuously, and they must be encouraged to take part in the process. It is also advisory to have separate events and/or questionnaires for the personnel. When the personnel are properly included in the process, it makes them more committed. Also the political decision makers need to be included in the place branding, and they must be kept up to date with the progress. When the participatory approach is communicated clearly to them it will decrease the possible culture shock of them not deciding on the final brand. Moreover, as the councilors are important communicators of the brand, and they have extensive networks, they must be well committed with the brand.

As a brand is never finished, the same goes with the place brand. Municipalities should continue to maintain and develop their place brand in participation with their stakeholders. This ensures that the place brand remains genuine and represents the place authentically. If possible, municipalities should have a contingency plan on how to develop their place brand in participation with their stakeholders.

5.4 Reliability and limitations of the study

Reliability is described as the extent of how consistent the results are over time and how accurately the total population is represented in the study (Joppe, 2000 via Golafshani, 2003). Next the reliability and limitations of this study are discussed.

The data for this study was collected by doing three semi-structured interviews. The questions for the interviews were formed after thoroughly examining the existing academic literature about the topic. The questions were not sent to the interviewees beforehand, but they knew what the interview was about – their municipality's participatory place branding process – and could prepare accordingly. All the interviews were conducted via telephone, which can be seen as both positive and negative with regards to the reliability of the study. This way the researcher did not influence the interviewees with her appearance in any way, but by being present the researcher might have been able to deepen the interview to some extent.

The interviews were recorded and afterwards transcribed word-for-word, which was done in order to increase the reliability of the study. The data received from the interviewees can be considered reliable, as they were closely involved in their municipalities' participatory place branding processes, making the information received first-hand knowledge.

This study was done using a multiple-case study approach. A number of three case municipalities were chosen for this study, as having more than one case increases the quality of the study and decreases its vulnerability (Yin, 2009, 53). By examining the participatory place branding of three municipalities, a more comprehensive view of the process has been obtained. This has allowed for making generalizations based on the answers. Of course, with a larger amount of case studies more validity could have been attained. Nevertheless, this study can still provide an in-depth view on participatory place branding in the municipal sector.

A limitation of the study is that the case municipalities are somewhat similar compared to each other, especially that they are all medium-large Finnish cities. Furthermore, this study is limited to using only Finnish municipalities as case studies, so the results may not be generalizable on a larger scale.

5.5 Future research

This study acts as a basis for future studies examining participatory place branding in more detail. As this study finds, participatory place branding brings many benefits and

municipalities should indeed use the participatory approach in their place branding. However, as this subject is still rather new, there is still need for extensive research in the future to establish its practises and terminology.

As was discussed in chapter 2, service-dominant logic has been increasingly attached to place branding. There still is not much research on that topic. In the future the research could focus on finding out the relations between service-dominant logic and participatory place branding.

Future research should concentrate in finding out how the place brand is best maintained and developed in a participatory way once the initial place branding is done using the participatory approach. This could include examining the methods of how the feeling of inclusion is best maintained amongst the stakeholders. In addition, it would be interesting to find out how the stakeholders experience the participatory place branding; what methods they prefer and what methods could be improved.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Interview questions translated into English.

Starting position

- Explain in general how you understand branding in the public sector?
- What do you think is inclusive branding?
- How has the branding been done in your municipality in general?
- What was your role in designing the branding?

The implementation of the branding process

- Why did you want to do branding in a participatory way?
- How did the process proceed?
- What was your role in executing the branding?
- How were the residents involved?
- How were city staff involved in branding?
- How has the new brand been implemented for the residents?
- How has the new brand been implemented for the city staff?
- What were the benefits / best aspects of the participatory process?
- What was the most challenging part of the participatory process?

Post-process situation

- What kind of feedback have you received about the participatory branding process?
- What do you think are the most important things in participatory branding?
- In hindsight, what would you do differently?
- How can political decisions (municipality government + municipality council) be kept in line with the brand?
- How will the participating take place in the future, i.e. did the participating end with the “finished” brand?
- What future plans do you have for branding?
- What tips would you give to other municipalities regarding participatory branding?